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such interesting examples of aberrant local texts not unaffected of course by translation influences, but by no means mainly due to them, that the Freer Gospels strikingly presents in John and Mark.

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THE ALLEGED PERSECUTION OF THE CHRISTIANS AT LYONS IN 177

A REPLY TO CERTAIN CRITICISMS

To the Editor of the American Journal of Theology:

May I be permitted a few pages in reply to the criticisms of my article "The Alleged Persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177," *American Journal of Theology*, July, 1912. The article has been sharply attacked by Professor Harnack in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 1913, No. 3, pp. 74-76, and by M. Paul Allard, the distinguished historian of the persecutions, in the *Revue des questions historiques* (of which he is editor) of January, 1913, pp. 53-67.

I fully expected sharp criticism, for the account in Eusebius is one of the most cherished traditions of the early church and has hitherto passed unchallenged. But I did not anticipate the degree of irritation that an article which M. Allard has recognized as that "d'un véritable historien" has caused Professor Harnack.

In spite of the progress that has been made in church history it is still true that much of our interpretation of it is yet unemancipated from tradition, and in many particulars we have not advanced far beyond Ruinart and Tillemont. The larger part of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, especially the documents he incorporates, must be searchingly examined, as searchingly as Seeck has studied the *Vita Constantini*. Not until that has been done will the foundations of church history have been laid. The weight of Eusebius' mere authority and his great reputation for learning, backed by inert tradition, have for centuries borne down criticism and led to a too uncritical acceptance of him. Professor Harnack's assertion that the letter in Eusebius, which gives the only account we have of the persecution of Lyons, "ist und bleibt ein wahrhaftiges und ergreifendes Zeugnis des ältesten Christentums" and M. Allard's statement concerning it that "la véracité ou l'authenticité a été considérée jusqu'à ce jour, par la quasi-unanimité des historiens, comme une des pièces les plus sûres que nous ait transmises

¹ The italics in this and other quotations are my own.

l'antiquité chrétienne" are an admission that the document never has been critically scrutinized.

Until the publication of my study no critical attempt to appraise the historical value of this letter had been made. Its credibility was accepted on faith, not on reason, and in spite of the objections of both these eminent scholars I still maintain the validity of my fundamental thesis; i.e., that the alleged persecution of 177 cannot be certainly ascribed to the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Professor Harnack's assertion that "der ganze Prozess wird grösstenteils über den Kopf des Angeklagten hinweg geführt" evades the question at issue. Of a piece with this evasion is the comment that "der Verfasser von den Bedingungen nichts ahnt, unter denen die älteste Geschichte der Kirche und ihre Berichterstattung gestanden hat," to which, obviously, there is no reply.

Both critics take exception to the *argumentum e silentio*. M. Allard is right in saying that "l'argument négatif . . . doit être manié avec beaucoup de réserve et de finesse," and refers me to P. de Smedt's *Principes de la critique historique*, which lies upon my desk. But on p. 365 of my article it will be observed that I have explicitly qualified the argument from silence, and a careful reading of the whole criticism ought to have shown the relatively little weight I attach to it, save in the cases of Lactantius and Sidonius Apollinaris, whose silence is, I think, really significant. The fact that Jerome mentions the persecution (*De viris* c. 35) signifies nothing, for Jerome certainly got his information from Eusebius;¹ and Eucher who was bishop of Lyons and died in 450, whom M. Allard also cites, had, in great probability, read Rufinus. M. Allard ingeniously says of the silence of Christian writers regarding the martyrs of Lyons: "est-il aussi certain que le pense M. Thompson?" and answers that question by finding a phrase in the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, "qui *semble* bien y faire allusion." I have read the extract carefully, but I cannot perceive that it can be made to apply to the persecution in Lyons more than to other known—or unknown—persecutions of a similar character. Professor Harnack's assumption that the silence of Hilarius conclusively excludes the argument from silence in the case of the others seems petty. The combined silence of Lactantius, Salvian, Sidonius Apollinaris, is too impressive to be dismissed with the unsupported assertion: "Also beweist ihr Schweigen doppelt nichts."

The very next paragraph in my article brings forward an argument

¹ He adds nothing to what is said in Eusebius.

based, not on silence, but upon Christian epigraphy. I have there attempted to assemble all the actual evidence of the marbles as to the probable existence of Christianity in Lyons before the third century. Professor Harnack passes over this testimony entirely, and M. Allard takes refuge in probability and assumption: "De Marseille, où il *semble* avoir eu des fidèles et *peut-être* des martyrs dès le commencement du II^e siècle (voir encore un sarcophage chrétien appartenant *très probablement* au II^e siècle, trouvé à la Gayolle, département du Var), les denrées et les idées, les voyageurs et les missionnaires ont, par le Rhône et la Saône, reflué dans l'intérieur du pays."

M. Allard and Professor Harnack both make much of Irenaeus, the former contending that, even if the letter in Eusebius did not exist, "la carrière et les écrits d'un tel personnage . . . seraient une démonstration de l'existence d'une chrétienté lyonnaise," and the latter emphatically asserting that, "Irenäus am Ende des 2. Jahrhunderts in Lyon als Bischof lebte und wirkte"; "das Bistum des Irenäus in Lyon um 180 eine unerschütterliche geschichtliche Tatsache ist!" Now far from forgetting the statement that Irenaeus was bishop of Lyons in 180, as Professor Harnack says I have, I made bold to question it. The belief rests solely upon the uncontrolled assertion of Eusebius, Book V, chap. 5, §8, who wrote nearly one hundred and fifty years after Irenaeus. All Irenaeus' works save the *Adversus haereses*, as every scholar knows, have perished; but it contains nothing to substantiate Eusebius' isolated testimony, nor is there anything in Tertullian, although Tertullian lauds Irenaeus to the skies.¹ Indeed I venture to conjecture that, excluding the statement of Eusebius, Irenaeus' own writings give color to the hypothesis that, if a bishop at all, he was only over the churches in the Bouches-du-Rhône; Eusebius' "of the parishes in Gaul of which Irenaeus was bishop" in Book V, chap. 23,² squares more with what we *know* of the Christian churches of the Mediterranean littoral than with what is merely *inferred* to have been the condition in Lyons when Irenaeus lived.³ There is not a scintilla of evidence in Irenaeus' own work that

¹ *Adversus Valentinianos* 5, written in 209. The fragment of Irenaeus from the work *Against Schism* addressed to Blastus is preceded by the statement that Irenaeus was bishop of Lyons. But this proves nothing. We do not know when the rubric was prefixed; in all probability the information was derived from Eusebius.

² τῶν κατὰ Γαλλίαν παροικιῶν ἃς Εἰρηναῖος ἐπισκεύει.

³ Duchesne is amply justified on the basis of epigraphical evidence in characterizing the Christian communities around the mouth of the Rhone as "groupes détachés, dispersés"; "plusieurs groupes de chrétiens, épars sur divers points du territoire." The point where I break with Duchesne is in doubting that these parishes depended

he ever labored in Lyons, and his testimony as regards the treatment of Christians in his time bears directly against the likelihood of a great persecution there in 177. He extols the imperial government: "Through their instrumentality the world is *at peace* and *we* walk in the highways *without fear* and sail where we will" (IV, 30, §3). He refers to "those believing ones who are in the imperial palace" (IV, 30, §1), without any reference to interference with their faith.

Both M. Allard and Professor Harnack assume that the relations between Lyons and Rome were close, yet neither attempts to explain the absence of any other evidence of correspondence between them beyond the letter which Irenaeus, as a presbyter of the church in Lyons, is said to have carried to Rome,¹ or to meet my argument based upon the absence of any evidence of this connection in the papal archives. M. Allard's statement that "*on ne pense pas encore à rédiger le martyrologe de toutes les églises, ou à écrire leur histoire*" seems somewhat lame.

It is perhaps not wholly unnatural that the critics of my article should attach but little weight to its strongest argument. The main ground of my contention against the probability of the persecution having taken place in the reign of Marcus Aurelius is a careful examination of the Roman law (pp. 268-77). I freely admit "*die ganz tendenziöse Äusserung*" of Tertullian *Apol.* 5, which Professor Harnack emphasizes, and that there are authentic instances of martyrdom in the reign of Marcus Aurelius. But it is begging the question for Professor Harnack to write: "*Wir wissen übrigens von der römischen Verwaltung in Detailpunkten viel zu wenig, um hier mit irgend welcher Wahrscheinlichkeit negativ kritisieren zu dürfen,*" and to dismiss all the evidence I have brought forward, with the remark: "*Allein die Latitüde des Richters in solchen Prozessen, wie es die Christenprozesse waren, war sehr gross, und das sichere Material, welches wir zur Vergleichung heranziehen können, ist viel zu gering, um uns zu gestatten, den Brief auf diese Beobachtungen hin für unecht zu erklären oder aus dem Ende des 2. an den Schluss des 3. Jahrhunderts zu verweisen.*" The truth would seem to be that Professor Harnack has but a limited knowledge of Roman law. There is but slight evidence in his writings that Mommsen or Marquardt have been attentively read by him.

on Lyons. Duchesne himself admits that the earliest of the bishoprics in Gaul (except Lyons, which he accepts solely on the statement of Eusebius) were probably on the lower Rhone and the Mediterranean coast in the *provincia Narbonnensis*.

¹ Eusebius, Book V, chap. 4.

M. Allard is on more familiar ground than is Professor Harnack when he discusses the legal arguments I have advanced. But even he resorts to generalities: "L'omnipotence relative dont jouissaient les gouverneurs, éloignés du siège du pouvoir central, et aussi la facilité avec laquelle les prescriptions légales tombaient en désuétude," of which he speaks hardly accords with the facts. He goes on:

Cette facilité, et la nécessité de remettre sans cesse à neuf les anciennes lois est un des faits les plus curieux de l'histoire du droit public romain. Le rescrit de Trajan à Pline avait cessé d'être observé dès le temps d'Hadrien puisque celui-ci est obligé de le renouveler par un rescrit adressé à Minucius Fundanus; les prescriptions d'Hadrien étaient violées sous Antonin, puisqu'il se voit contraint de les rappeler dans de nouveaux rescrits envoyés à plusieurs villes grecques; les prescriptions d'Antonin étaient *probablement* tombées en désuétude sous Marc-Aurèle."

But Hadrian's rescript to Minucius Fundanus "is by no means above suspicion"¹ and moreover, according to Hardy² "was intended, as indeed it naturally would be for the special circumstances of Asia. It does not, in any way, as I interpret it, rescind the decision of Trajan . . . but to avoid any miscarriage of justice . . . *it lays down more stringent conditions for the proof of punishable crime.*" Under Antoninus Pius things were theoretically the same. What Marcus Aurelius' *legislation* was we know from his rescripts [cited on p. 370 of my article, preserved by Modestinus in the *Digest*, XXX, 48, 19 (30) and in Paul's *Sentences*, V, 21, 2. It is evasive for Professor Harnack to write in this connection: "In unserem Fall aber steht die Sache für die Thesis des Verfassers noch besonders ungünstig; denn dass Marc Aurel gegen Ende seiner Regierung die allgemeinen Maximen in Sachen der Christen ausdrücklich eingeschränkt hat, ist gewiss." His implication is not confirmed by what is known of Marcus Aurelius' legislation. Polycarp's death was not legal execution, but lynching. The martyrdoms of Ptolemaeus and Lucius in the reign of Antoninus³ are *specific* cases; they were not the victims of a *general* local persecution as was the case in Lyons. M. Allard⁴ has gathered together all the evidence for the martyrdoms of this epoch and in no instance is one warranted in believing that any one of them was of a *general* nature. Moreover, we are not justified in inferring government action from "violent manifestations of popular feeling which the provincial governors had not the strength

¹ J. B. Bury, ed. of Gibbon, II, 544.

² *The Church and the Roman Government*, p. 143.

³ Justin *Apol.* II, 2.

⁴ *Histoire des persécutions*, I, 397-99, 4th ed.

or the will to resist.”¹ The case at Lyons is obviously not of this latter kind, for the emperor was not left in ignorance. M. Allard argues that the statement that the emperor in his instructions to the governor “*passee sous silence l’interdiction de les rechercher d’office*” proves that Marcus Aurelius was a resolute persecutor. But so to argue is to assume a more violent departure from the policy of Trajan and Antoninus than is warranted by what we know of the history of his reign. On the other hand, such an abrogation of the policy of Trajan—*conquirendi non sint*—would be in entire harmony with the policy of the post-Decian emperors.

Both Professor Harnack and M. Allard pass over the significant absence of any attempt to compel the Christians of Lyons to burn incense to the bust of the emperor, although until the first general edict of Decius that was the usual test (see my article, p. 373 and note). As to the rationale of the use of torture, in spite of M. Allard’s learning, I must venture to differ from him. That recantation was often a result of torture is undoubted, but that the motive of torture was to secure recantation and not to extort evidence I do not think is warranted by what we know of Roman law during the period of the persecutions. In spite, too, of M. Allard’s discussion of the use of fire in the execution of Christians I can but reiterate my statement on pp. 373–74. In the examples M. Allard cites he fails to distinguish between mob-lynching or at least “violent manifestations of popular feeling which provincial governors had either not the will or the strength to resist” and legal execution. Moreover, neither M. Allard nor Professor Harnack takes cognizance of the extraordinary treatment of those who recanted (see my article, p. 375). They can hardly fail to allow that all the evidence here presented harmonizes far better with the practice of the third century than with that of the second.

In the matter of the treatment of the remains of those who perished at Lyons, M. Allard objects to my statement that it “is of a piece with all the rest in its illegality,” and refers to Mommsen’s *Strafrecht*, p. 624 (German ed.). But he has failed to observe that elsewhere (on p. 591), Mommsen admits a relaxation of the law in this regard in the second century, owing to the flagrant abuse of it by Tiberius and Domitian. Moreover, my critic lays his emphasis on the wrong point. It is not that the Christian dead were denied sepulture, but that their bodies were destroyed, which is the important fact. This destruction is, I submit, a third-century development. As to the use of fire in persecution, M. Allard’s contention that “le supplice du feu, introduit, *semble-t-il*, au commencement de l’empire, fut toujours légal,” is not warranted by

¹ Hardy, p. 131.

the evidence of Roman law. Death by fire and execution at a popular fête was legal only after the third century, probably from the time of Septimius Severus.¹ Now this is exactly what is said to have happened at Lyons.

M. Allard argues that "la communauté lyonnaise décrite par la lettre de 177 correspond tout à fait à ce temps et à ce milieu," and that this *milieu* would have ceased to be Greco-oriental in the third century and have become Latinized. He claims that in the reign of Marcus Aurelius Hellenism was everywhere so predominant that "la langue grecque *paraît* parlée par les magistrats comme par les accusés chrétiens plus que la langue latine,"(!) that the responses of Sanctus and Attalus τῇ Ῥωμαικῇ φωνῇ prove the slight western admixture in the Christian community at Lyons; but that, if, as I hold, the persecution actually took place in the third century, the pastors would have been Gallo-Roman and the governor would also have spoken Latin.

The facts which we know will not bear out this argument. In the first place, the church in Lyons still preserved traces of its early oriental character as late as the fifth and the sixth centuries (see my article, p. 368, note) and these must have been still stronger in the third century. In the second place, it is not difficult to surmise why Sanctus and Attalus should have replied in Latin. The former being Latin by race, and the second a Roman citizen, the assumption that they would have used Greek is unwarranted. In the third place, M. Allard is in error when he assumes that the magistrate used Greek. That Marcus Aurelius wrote his *Reflections* in Greek proves nothing. Greek was the language of culture in the second century as French was in the eighteenth. But Greek was *not* the usual language of administration in the Antonine period. Admitting the "magic power" of the Greek tongue and its prevalence as a commercial and literary medium; admitting that edicts which have come down to us pertaining to the administration of Egypt and a great number of Asian inscriptions prove the official use of Greek in the oriental provinces, nevertheless the energy of the imperial government from Trajan to Marcus Aurelius was so great that in the Antonine epoch Latin gained *even in the East* and Greek declined.² Is it

¹ Mommsen ascribes the revival of these drastic statutes, though not with perfect certainty, to Septimius Severus (†211)—*Strafrecht*, p. 591.

² See Marquardt, *Römische Staatsverwaltung*, 2 ed., I, 555. Aristides, ed. Dindorf, I, 105, referring to the reign of Antoninus Pius. The study of Roman law was considered the surest road to official preferment in the second century. Even as late as the fifth century, Latin was the dominant language of administration in the East—see Mansi, *Concilia* iv. 1282; vii. 54, 455 (431 A.D.).

possible to think that a Roman proconsul in the West, in a city so thoroughly Roman in origin and foundation as Lyons was (see my article, p. 368, note 60), would have used Greek instead of Latin in his official capacity?

M. Allard and Professor Harnack unite in objecting to my argument that:

1. The *furor passionis martyrum* is especially a third century characteristic.

2. Miraculous additions are a third-century embellishment.

In refutation of No. 1, M. Allard cites Ignatius, Justin, Perpetua, and the Scilitan martyrs. But how many more may be cited from the third century! As for Professor Harnack, he brings forward no evidence whatever to refute the statement.

In refutation of No. 2, M. Allard contents himself with saying that "sans miracles la rapide propagation du christianisme est bien difficile à expliquer." It would be idle to attempt to refute such conviction. M. Allard admits miracles as historical facts; I do not. Professor Harnack's doubt might be resolved by reading Mommsen, "Der Prozess des Christen Apollonios" in the *Sitzungsberichte* of the Berlin Academy, XXVII (1894). My statement has the great authority of Professor Bury to sustain it as the reference in the footnote of my article, p. 379, shows.

M. Allard objects to my statement that dialogue between the judge and the accused, which is conspicuously absent in the letter in Eusebius, is a striking characteristic of the authentic records of the martyrs of the second century. Aside from the authority for this conclusion, which I have cited in the note, the *procès-verbaux* of the trials of Apollonius and the Scilitan martyrs are partial refutation of M. Allard's objection and the general body of martyrological literature, I think, will sustain the position I take.

Professor Harnack ridicules my conjecture that these Christians of Lyons were Montanists. Yet Eusebius, Book V, chap. 3, says in the chapter *immediately following* the account of the persecution at Lyons:

The followers of Montanus in Phrygia were now first giving wide circulation to their assumption in regard to prophecy . . . and as dissension arose concerning them the brethren in Gaul set forth their own pious and most orthodox judgment in the matter, and published also several epistles from the witnesses that had been put to death among them. These they sent, while they were still in prison, to the brethren throughout Asia and Phrygia and also to Eleutherus who was then bishop of Rome negotiating for the peace of the churches.

Now Salmon in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, III, 937, basing his arguments on Eusebius's word "orthodox," argues that the Christians of Lyons were opposed to the Montanists and urged Eleutherus to condemn them. But I am not wrong in saying that it has been assumed that the Christians at Lyons favored the Montanists. Professor McGiffert, in his translation of Eusebius, p. 219, note, says that it has been "commonly assumed" that the Christians in Lyons were Montanists though he does not agree with it. Professor Harnack himself seems once to have been inclined to this opinion. Has he changed his mind? There is, however, further evidence that supports the theory that these Christians were Montanists. That there was from early times a considerable colony of Asian Greeks and Syrians in Lyons is certain (see the proofs in my article, p. 367, note 57). While most of these may have been Syrians, the inscriptions² prove that there were some from Galatia and Nicomedia, and Attalus himself was a native of Pergamum. Now the province of Phrygia, the home of Montanism, lies directly south of Nicomedia and due east of Pergamum and is adjacent to the provinces in which these cities are located, while Galatia is directly east of Phrygia. Professor Harnack himself says that "with great rapidity the Montanist movement flowed over into Galatia and Ancyra on the east side and into Asia (where Pergamum was) on the other."³ In the circumstances I do not see why it is not reasonable to infer that Montanism may have been known and espoused in the Rhone valley by compatriots of the people of Phrygia and the surrounding provinces. There is also internal evidence, in the account of the persecution in Eusebius, which smacks of Montanism. The heroic mold in which Blandina is cast is characteristic of the great rôle played by women among the Montanists. It is curious that Irenaeus in his treatise on heresy omits to mention Montanism. Why? Because, like Tertullian, he may have had Montanist leanings? And if so, whence was he most likely to have derived them, save from the Christians of the Rhone valley—though not necessarily of Lyons—among whom he lived?

The remaining points made by Professor Harnack are so trivial they hardly need more than a word.

¹ Salmon's argument is not a bar to Professor Harnack, who is his *History of Dogma*, II, 97, says: "The confessors at Lyons openly expressed their full sympathy with the movements in Asia." Elsewhere (p. 161) he says more guardedly: "The Gallic confessors *cautiously* interfered in their behalf."

² Brehier, "Les colonies d'Orientaux en Occident," *Byz. Zeitschrift*, XII, 14.

³ *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, II, 215.

1. He says that my statement that Rufinus translated Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* into Latin at the instance of Jerome "ist mir neu." To be absolutely exact, Rufinus translated it at the suggestion of Chromatius, bishop of Aquileia, the friend of Jerome (see the *Proæmium* but cf. Ebert, *Geschichte der Literatur des Mittelalters*, I, 323).

2. He says that it is improbable that Sulpicius had read Rufinus. Why? Rufinus died in 410 and Sulpicius *circa* 410. We do not know how long before his death Rufinus finished his translation. I decline to admit Harnack's contention that "jedoch kommt auf beide Behauptungen in diesem Zusammenhang gar nichts an."

3. Professor Harnack puts a double interrogation point (??) after the name of *Sextus* Rufus on p. 362 of my article. But a simple misprint of Sextus for Festus seems unworthy of so great emphasis.

4. Professor Harnack objects to my mention of Libanius as a historian. True, "the silence of pagan 'writers,'" etc., instead of "historians" would have been more correct. Libanius was not a "historian," but there are few writers of the fourth century whose works are of more historical value. This is obviously what I meant.

I readily admit that my statement on p. 379 in regard to the Virgin is too sweeping, and I thank M. Allard for drawing my attention to it. I feel, too, the force of his contention that accusations of grossly immoral practices—"Thyestean banquets and Oedipodean intercourse" (Eusebius, Book V, chap. 1, § 14) gradually ceased to be imputed to the Christians. It is true that these accusations do not appear so often in the anti-Christian literature of the third century as in that of the second. But the main support of M. Allard's statement appears to be Eusebius, Book IV, chap. 7, § 14, and one cannot be certain how much of the thought of the fourth century Eusebius is reading back into the past.

JAMES WESTFALL THOMPSON